



STAFF PHOTO/WESLEY ENNIS

Duxbury Endangered Species Officer Mike Pfor points to a closed stretch of Duxbury Beach where piping plovers are nesting. It's Pfor's job to protect the tiny birds, which are listed as a protected species under the Endangered Species Act of 1986.

Michael Pfor protects the plovers

This is the second part of a look at the harbor-master's office in our continuing series about life on the water in Duxbury.

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Charadrius melodus, also known as the piping plover, brings out Endangered Species Officer Michael Pfor's paternal instincts.

During the summer months, ESO Pfor closes sections of the beach to the public to protect the little plovers. He keeps a watchful eye on all their nesting spots, ensuring the babies are out of

There is little room in the ESO pickup, jammed between the passenger side door and multiple radio receivers. Pfor explained his ESO duties as miles of sea and sand blew by the open window.

Like many in his position before, Pfor became the ESO when he began working part time for the department. He worked his way up to assistant harbormaster before taking over as ESO.

"Most of my job is hands-on learning," Pfor said.

Pfor was sworn into his position this past March, but has been the acting ESO and operations officer since November 2005.

Before he checked the plovers, he conducted his beach patrol, checking all the crossovers. The patrol involved driving the tracks, looking at the old nesting grounds of the plovers and looking in on the fishermen and the beachgoers.

He drove down each crossover, looking over endless stretches of beach and water. The drive-on beaches are swim at your own risk. Directly over the footbridge, to the left and down to Blakeman's, the beach is manned with lifeguards. On a hot summer weekend day, there are more than 9,000 people on the beach and more than 500 vehicles. During those months, Pfor will have between four to six guys, besides himself, working at the beach.



A locked chain closes the second cross-over on Duxbury Beach, where endangered piping plovers are nesting.

It's not just a day at the beach

After checking the crossovers, it was off to see the plovers. Pfoor parked the vehicle off the road by one of the few remaining occupied nesting sites to look at the birds. He walked across the grass-covered beach into an open space where the birds ran freely.

Pfoor noted which high-pitched chirping sound was actually the plovers and which were just sandpipers singing. As we walked, he stopped and listened. His training taught him how to tell the difference between the chirp of a plover and other birds – the plovers' is a little softer, but, had he

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He pointed out the difference, it could be hard to discern. He said a tiny dot that blended into the sand was a plover.

"It's there, behind the little grassy patch of sand," Pfoor said.

Then, for a brief second, the little bird appeared before its body once again was camouflaged by the soft sand. Getting a picture was out of the question for a recreational digital camera. The little plovers are too small, and too quick.

Pfoor said the plovers' sand-colored bodies are their natural protection from predators. The sand is also where the birds lay their eggs and raise their young. For that reason, sections of Duxbury beach are closed at the beginning of the summer.

Humans are one of the endangered birds' biggest threats, simply because they are unaware the birds are around. Officials close the nesting sections to prevent people from either stepping on their nests or driving over them.

If it were not for Pfoor taking care of the plovers' nesting areas and keeping them safe every day, this beach, like many in surrounding areas, would have to be closed. Pfoor works closely with the Massachusetts Audubon Society to ensure the safety of the protected birds.

At 23, Pfoor is the full time ESO and operations officer for the Duxbury Harbormaster Department. Pfoor is also a full-time student at

Bridgewater State College earning a degree in criminal justice. He is a licensed emergency medical technician and first responder.

As the ESO and operations officer, Pfoor is stationed primarily at the beach during the summer months. He is responsible for beach and waterways from Blakeman's to the Gurnet. In most cases of emergency he and other members of the harbormaster's

department are the first ones on scene. Pfoor's medical training allows him the ability to care for patients until paramedics arrive. Although he is in charge of making sure everyone using the beach is following the rules, his main concern is keeping everyone safe – including the plovers.

As Pfoor drives off the beach, children play in the soft sand by the truck

tracks. Pfoor slows, rolls down his window and politely asks the children to be careful. "I am more proactive rather than reactive," he said.

The beach is quiet Monday, providing a relaxing day for Pfoor coming off a busy weekend. His youthful good looks and soft spoken manner make it all the easier for children, beach goers and plovers to heed his proactive advice.



Staff photo/Wesley Ennis

Mike Pfoor patrols the beach in his four-wheel truck.



STAFF PHOTO/WESLEY ENNIS

Mike Pfoor returns from inspecting a closed area near the second cross-over on Duxbury Beach.